J. MICHAEL STRACZYNSKI

JOHN ROMITA JR. • SCOTT HANNA

the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN®

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES

MARVEL

the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN

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MARVEL
PG 51

STRACZYNSKI
ROMITA JR
HANNA

the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN

PROLOGUE.

Las Vegas. July 3, 1957.

HOTEL

GOLDDIGGER

RESORT

The story of the Vegas Thirteen is a piece of unsubstantiated lore dating back to the fifties. The story involved a meeting of some of the most powerful Wise Guys from New York and Nevada.

The meeting was called at the height of the struggle between the Mafia families fighting for control of the Vegas casino, money laundering and prostitution business.

It was to be a Bosses' Night out, to resolve the conflict peacefully. Seven bosses, seven lieutenants, all unarmed.

It was only as the dinner began that they noticed only six bosses were present. Missing was Morris Forelli, from New York. Since his trusted lieutenant, George Sims, was present, the rest were unconcerned, assuming that Forelli had simply been delayed.

They did not know that Forelli had discovered Sims was working for one of the rival families, and had helped arrange a recent hit on one of Forelli's sons. To say the least, Sims was out of favor.

And Forelli was out of patience.

The result, according to Mob word of mouth, was the biggest hit of its kind since the Saint Valentine's Day Massacre. Six leading Mafia figures and their lieutenants, plus Forelli's consigliere, wiped out in one night, in one bold move.

But the Mob had learned a few lessons since the last time something like this was attempted. They wanted no evidence that could be printed in newspapers or magazines. No photos. No witnesses.

No bodies.

STAN LEE PRESENTS: DIGGER

Forelli's men carried the bodies out of the Golddigger Hotel and Casino and transported them across the Nevada desert, well off the beaten track.

The story suggests that the bodies were brought to a pit dug by earth movers in an isolated part of the desert, far from cities or roads, and Forelli's men proceeded to pile the bodies into a mass grave once used for illegally dumping chemicals from several nearby factories.

Here ended the careers of some of the most notorious members of the New York and Nevada crime families. Men raised in blood, who understood only violence, and whose lives ended in a shower of bullets.

Their bodies were left where no one would ever find them, with only the whispers of their conscience, and the rage of their souls, to keep them company. For the Vegas Thirteen, it was the end of their story.

Marshall LeGrand,
A Brief History of the Gangland Wars, 1950-1963.

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April 3, 2003.

AP NEVADA - In a move designed to keep United States military assets at peak readiness, the Pentagon today announced a return to limited testing of high-energy weapons.

"We're looking to gather data on the new technologies we've developed and the degree they may maximize the amount of energy output involved, giving us bigger yields from smaller payloads," explained General Maxwell Sinclair, Pentagon Liaison.

"We'll start out with underground testing using what we call pocket devices, small enough to have no effect or environmental impact outside a very small part of the Nevada desert. No fallout, no seismic damage."

"Our first test will be with a pocket Gamma device."

"We don't anticipate any problems."

"We believe that gamma rays may have been crucial to the development of life on Earth," explained UCLA's Dr. Henry Davis, a leading proponent of gamma ray research.

"That process was set in motion when gamma rays struck the pre-organic compounds and chemical soup of primordial Earth."

"And from that dark, barren emptiness, came life."

"Then, as God said on the seventh day..."

"...let the good times roll."

"So, are we having a good time, or what?"

Yes. We're having fun. We're having so much fun, I...

What was the question?

Who cares?

Exactly!

The question is, what would sir like for his entree?

Steak tartare.

Well done.

:snicker!:

I believe sir may be mistaken. Steak tartare is prepared uncooked.

Obviously a problem in the kitchen.

Shhhh!

If sir would prefer, I could have someone run across the street and return with a Happy Meal.

I know! Bring me a hammer, twelve oysters and twelve teeny, tiny revolvers. That way at least it'll be a fair fight. Poor bastards...

:SNORT!:

In fact, make it a ball peen hammer. I'm feeling lucky.

Stopstopstop... stop or I'm gonna have to go to the bathroom...

Perhaps I should return later, when sir is on the same dimensional plane --

No...it's okay...make it a steak. Two New York steaks. Medium-well. We're celebrating.

My wife has come back to me.

She must have forgotten the keys to the car...

Peter...when we're done here, and we go to my hotel, since your place is a disaster, I have an idea.

Yeah? What.

No.

No? You're saying *no?* To *me?* To *that?*

I've had a wonderful time, and I've had sufficient libations to float...something or other... and when we...

When *we...* and boy will we *ever...*

I want it to be right. Because I love you.

Being conscious probably wouldn't hurt either.

Peter, the two of us just being in the same room would be enough.

But maybe not tonight. No need to rush.

"We'll get there, our own way, and at our own speed."

ING

W 26ST YARD

B&O 5106

Hey, you... somebody in there? You know better than that. Get out. C'mon. Get the hell outta there.

You heard me. Get *out* of --

What the...get... no! Somebody, help!

HELP!

F.N.R. SECURITY

TURNER

NOOOOOO!

"It was a long trip, but the best investment I've ever made."

I still can't believe MJ's back. Yeah, she's staying at the hotel for a while, and we've still got some things to talk through. This won't be worked out overnight.

But she's back in town, and we're together, and we'll get there, and --

I'M THE LUCKIEST GUY IN THE WORLD!

SHADDUP! I'M TRYIN' TA SLEEP IN HERE!

I'M THE LUCKIEST GUY IN THE WORLD! I'M THE LUCKIEST GUY IN THE WORLD! I'MTHELUCKIEST GUYNTHEWORLD!

SHADDUP! SHADDUP! SHADDUP! SHADDUP! SHADDUPSHADDUPSHADDUP!

"HEY, WHERE'S YOUR SENSE OF ROMANCE?"

"I GOT YER ROMANCE RIGHT HERE, BUDDY!"

So, you want a date?

How much?

A hundred for everything.

Too high --

You wanna bargain, go try the garment district.

Look, I'm telling you, I don't have the money --

Then *get* the money.

I'm doing the best I can. I got the girls working all night --

It's all penny ante stuff, and I've seen your girls. What happened? Was it bargain night at the plastic surgeon's office?

I swear, I'll have the money I owe you by Friday --

Not good enough. We let you work this part of town for five G's a week. You don't pony up the dough, we'll find someone who will.

FWUMP!

After we break your legs.

I was just getting to that. Stop getting ahead. You're always getting ahead.

That you, Rachel? You shouldn't be here. Rachel?

I don't care if you keep the girls out there until dawn, either we get the five grand by tomorrow, or you got a problem with us, and most of all, you got a problem with Mister Forelli.

..Forelli..

Yeah, that's --

What the --

...Forelllllllli....

...We remember Forelllli....

...have a message...for Forelllli...

Hey... wait...get back --

Tell him...

Tell him... that the boys are back in town.

BLAMM-BLAMM-BLAMM!

Hunh!

Ohgod, ohgod, ohgod...

Get out.

Go, go, go --

What about --

Forget him, he's dead.

Your friend will carry the message. But you **are** the message.

Tough break.

WHAM! WHAM!

CRASH!

Johnny...?

PUMMMBBBBLLLE

Holy --

EEEEEEEEEE!

Message... delivered.

"What d'you think, Lieutenant? This weird or what?"

Yep.
You talk to the girls?
Yep.
They're pretty shaken up.
NYPD
Yep.
They said this place was paying off the Forelli family. You think it's a mob hit?
Nope.
Why not?
Oh... just a guess.
So what're you gonna do now?
First, I'm gonna wash out my ears with hydrochloric acid. After that...
I may need to bring in a consultant.
Yeah? What, like one of those psychic detectives? I got a guy, his sister is real good with that stuff --
Well, well, look what I found over here.
What's that?
"The part of your brain that knows when to shut the hell up. Get an evidence bag. A *small* one."
So here's what I'm thinking: we get dinner, then maybe a show, I'm thinking Producers, even if it isn't the A team anymore, or we can do that new show, the one I can't ever remember --
-- or we can --
-- we can --

It's not cannon fire, it's just your heart... it's not cannon fire, it's just your heart... it's not cannon fire, it's just your....

Peter?

You know that thing people do, where they talk a lot, because they're nervous so they try to keep things moving, don't let any silence into the conversation, just keep it all light?

Maybe.

I was just thinking that...it's a good thing we're past that. I mean, it's been a while since we've been around each other, but I think it would be a shame if there were that kind of awkwardness, don't you?

Silence is good. I like silence. I like that song, *"Sounds of Silence,"* I liked *"Silence of the Lambs,"* I'm even big on *"Silent Night,"* even when it's sung off-key, which it always is, and --

Could I have another one of those, if you've got a spare, because that was good, the whole lips thing, and the face touching, because I could do that all night until I go on patrol and --

Deal.

Funny how things work out sometimes.

When MJ came back, I was afraid the Parker luck would hold up, and we wouldn't have any time to spend with each other, that one of my favorite stalkers would come out to play, but so far it's been --

EEEEEEEE! HELP!

-- quiet.

EEEEEEEEE! SOMEONE HELP!

Stupid, Peter. Never comment on a no-hitter until *after* the game.

Lamont? What the hell are you --

About time. I wondered when you were gonna show up.

EEEEEEEE!

You did this to get my attention?

It's not like you gave me your phone number. What else am I gonna do?

You know how many other guys came by before you finally showed up? Daredevil, Thor, half the Fantastic Four, which I guess would be the Terrific Two --

EEEEEEEE! KLIK

So why didn't you use one of them?

I don't know them. I know you. One costume in my life is plenty, thanks.

Two dates and already we're going steady. You're such a sweetie.

One more remark and I'm playing *"YMCA"* on the boom-box. Loud. In German.

I'm all yours.

"So, where are we going?"

"Best if you see for yourself."

LOMBARDI DEMOLITION
GLEN HEAD, NY
(516) 555-1359

Must've been some party.

Yeah. The handprint over there pretty much confirms it was one of your kind.

You mind explaining that *"one of your kind"* remark?

What's wrong, mask cutting off the blood to your brain? It's pretty obvious.

No, it's not. Look, there's good guys and bad guys. I'm one of the good guys, okay? I don't go around killing people, or --

Smashing buildings? Scaring people? Getting into fights with each other, fights so big the city takes weeks to fix it all just so you bunch can do it all over again?

You're a costume. You're a power. You live in my city.

And you're a pain. All of you.

Sure, you can do some good, and right now, I need you. But tell the truth: if every costume disappeared and the city was just the ordinary bad guys and the ordinary cops...don't you think it'd be just a little better for everybody?

I --

What did you want to show me?

I had my people take the impressions off this and get them over to the lab for fingerprint analysis. We checked every active perp file and came up empty.

Then we did a search on the inactive files we keep on guys who are presumed dead or missing, but don't know for a fact. Because sometimes guys we think are dead come out of hiding behind fake names and surprise us.

Sure enough, we found a match.

This thumbprint, over here? It belongs to a mob enforcer named Santo Castellani.

So if you know who this guy is, why --

See, this is what happens when you don't let people finish what they're saying. You always like this?

Go on, fine, whatever...

So yeah, we know who Santo Castellani is. First problem is, he was last seen in 1957, and he was thirty two years old at the time. That'd make him --

Seventy-seven.

You're doing it again.

Sorry. It's a math thing. I can't help myself.

Second problem is...the fingerprint on the index finger belongs to Jimmy *"Little Man"* Desanti. Also considered dead or missing, and I'm not telling you how old he was when he disappeared in '57 because I can't handle you and the math thing at the same time, but --

Wait a minute --

Two fingerprints, from two different guys, on the same hand? That's not possible.

That's why I called you. Well, that plus anybody who can do this to a hunk of steel is probably a little outside my range.

Anything else on this guy?

Yeah, two things. First, one of the witnesses heard him say, *"Tell Forelli the boys are back in town."* Second thing is, he's green.

Green?

Green. As in, it's not easy being.

"Well, one thing's for sure...a guy like that -"

STARLIGHT

ABYSS

"-- it's not like he can just throw on a coat and fit in, y'know?"

NY

-- and I'm never never never gonna go back! Never look back! 'Cause the devil's comin' for me on a fast track.

Eyes like needles, hands like knives but he doesn't know I got nine lives.

What the hell kind of place is this, anyway?

Yo, son, chill --

This used to be a high-class joint. The Starlight. Steaks and martinis and broads with legs up to here --

Hey, back off --

-- or you and me gonna have a problem, you got that?

A problem? I don't think so.

I don't *have* a problem.

You're the one with the problem.

AAAAAAAHHH!

Anybody *else* got a problem? Huh? Anybody? C'mon... somebody have a problem. No?

Now I want a martini. And I wanna hear Sinatra, and Sammy Davis, and Rosemary Clooney, and...what the hell was the name of that lazy bastard...yeah, I wanna hear Peter Lawford, and I'm gonna --

&@#% off!

-- and I'm gonna have some *fun*.

AAAAARRGGHHH!

Run!

Get outta here!

Eeeek!

Wait, you didn't give me your number!

YOU CALL THAT CRAP MUSIC?! I WANNA HEAR "WHEN THE MOON HITS YOUR EYE LIKE A BIG PIZZA PIE, THAT'S AMORE!"

Uh, oh... that can't be good.

Better check it out...

"CHECK THIS OUT!"

You wanna hear real music? How about some singing by this group called the Heavenly Choir --

I --

What the --?

I had a complaint about the noise.

Yeah? No kidding. I'll do something about that --

-- right after I rip off your legs and beat you to death with 'em.

MARVEL

PG 52

STRACZYNSKI

ROMITA JR

HANNA

the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN®

A lot of people think that my advantage comes in the form of my strength, agility, spider sense.

You know... the usual.

They're wrong. It's a fifty-fifty split between all that, and the fact that I have a scientist's mind.

I approach any given situation and work to deduce what's going on, what my liabilities are, and who I'm up against.

And who the hell are *you* in *that* getup?

He's loud, annoying, he's broken up this party and he doesn't care who I am.

Deduction: he's from the Bronx.

STAN LEE PRESENTS:

DIG THIS

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Hey, yo! That's Spider-Man, dude, and he's gonna kick your green ass!

That so?

THEN LET'S GO, PUNK! DIGGER'S IN TOWN AND WE'RE GONNA HAVE FUN!

Holy...

Close quarters, he's strong, somebody's liable to get hurt.

Listen, I've got an idea, why don't we take this outside, away from all these nice people?

Not interested.

UNGH!

I was wrong... he's not strong... he's *real* strong.

If you can't...play nice...with your toys...

...then I'll just have to take them *away* from you.

Have to contain this guy fast, because I'm starting to get a bad feeling about what that green skin might represent.

What the --

I pour it on, dumping two whole cartridges on him, enough to stop a train.

What the hell is this stuff? Huh? What, you afraid of a fair fight, ya creep?

When the cartridges come up empty, I wait to find out if that's just lime green, or forest green, or apple green, or --

YAAARRGHH!

Yep. That's what I was afraid of.

Hulk green.

Okay, goombah, it's you and me.

Goombah? *Goombah?* Does anyone outside the Sopranos really *say* goombah anymore?

EXIT

Got to come get me first.

I need to keep him busy, give everybody time to clear out.

You got it.

UNGH!

Okay, that's it. He rattled my teeth with that one, and I don't like it when that happens. I mean, how many times can I explain to my dentist that I need to have my fillings replaced?

Again?

Okay, you want some?

Come get it.

KA-FOOOM!

WHOA!

...OW...

You know, it never occurred to me until right now that I could probably sell stuff like that on eBay...

"Buy Spider-Man's butt-print in a plaster wall."

Also available in concrete, bricks, steel, iron, lead....

Can't sit here... he's probably coming after me anytime...

Oh.

Uhm... evening, Lieutenant Lamont.

Do you feel a breeze, or is it just me?

So did this guy say anything we could use?

Not really, except --

Except what?

He didn't know who I was, and he seemed kind of out of place in that club. The way he talked, it was like he was out of the fifties.

That confirms what some of the others have told us. He kept talking about the Starlight Club like it was still in business, but that place closed fifteen years ago.

You said his prints matched three different guys, all of whom disappeared something like forty years ago.

Yeah. So the cultural gap matches.

Still doesn't explain how this guy can have multiple prints.

Maybe he's planting them, to throw us off?

Maybe.

Lieutenant, you got a second?

Sure.

I decide not to mention my suspicions about the green skin until I have more information. I want to be sure of what I'm talking about before I raise the red flag on something that big.

I've done all I can here, I should probably --

Hey, you.

You talking to me?

What, you see some other hey-you in a funny costume standin' here?

If it's about autographs, I really don't do that sort of thing, so tell your mom I can't --

My boss, Mr. Forelli, wants to see you.

Forelli. Lamont said that was the name Digger mentioned the last time he broke up a place.

Yeah? What does he want?

I look to you like a guy Mr. Forelli tells his innermost thoughts to?

Mmmmmmmmm... no.

But I bet your mother thinks you're still a cutie.

My *mother's* on the horizontal hold.

Now get inna car.

I appreciate the invitation, but I try not to get into closed spaces with total strangers.

So fine, you gonna run alongside or somethin'?

That's okay, I'm sure we'll think of something.

Bet you a buck *this* isn't covered by New York City traffic regs.

Huh... it is. Who knew?

WILL YOU FER CHRISSAKES GET IT IN GEAR?

He just made it out to Spider-Man, so how the heck can it even be a valid ticket? I think he made up that subsection, he had that look...

"Thank you for coming."

Well, it *is* Bingo Night at St. Catherine's, but since we've been friends for all these years --

We just met.

See, you're just no fun anymore.

Ah. A wise guy. I've known plenty of wise guys in my time.

They're all dead now.

Me, I have no sense of humor. And I've lived a nice, long time.

You say something?

No, without a sense of humor it just seems long.

Not a word.

This thing you fought, this Digger, you know he's been coming after my business interests.

You call hookers and drug dealers business?

I didn't bring you here for an argument. I brought you here to ask you a question.

No way do those pants go with that jacket.

That wasn't the question.

Oh.

If this guy is coming after my interests, then it's only a matter of time before he comes after me.

I want to hire you as my bodyguard.

You're kidding.

Were you listening to what I said before about not having a sense of humor? I want to hire you for protection.

My guys can take care of most problems, but this guy is way outside their league.

Sorry. Not interested.

I can pay very well for a man of your skills.

Not interested.

You wouldn't have to do anything more than you already do, which is to protect people. It would just give me a measure of comfort to know I could call on you.

Not interested.

I'm offering ten thousand dollars per day.

Ten thousand dollars a *day?*

Cash, check or money order. We can even handle the withholding tax if you want to keep everything squeaky clean.

Ten grand a day.

We just covered that.

To do nothing illegal.

Not even litter.

Just to protect you from somebody I'd protect you from anyway if I happened to come by.

Just to guarantee you'll come by at the right time.

Plus expenses.

Deal.

Plus one other thing.

If this guy's coming after you and your interests, I'm betting there's some kind of grudge involved. So give...who is this guy and why is he tearing up all the disagreeable parts of town?

Truth is, I have no idea. My...sources in the police department tell me that fingerprints found at the scene of his prior rampage match those of several men I knew a very long time ago.

All of them dead, I understand.

Which makes this very... disturbing to me.

"The last time I saw them, they were all happy, healthy... they had come to Vegas for a dinner. We'd arranged the meeting to work out some differences in opinion.

"Unfortunately, I was delayed here in New York."

"And did these... *differences* get worked out?"

"After a fashion..."

What happened to them, or where they disappeared to, I have no idea.

None?

At all.

Sorry. Deal's off.

Wait --

I'm not going into this blind or with my hands tied behind my back, or --

All right...all right.

Give me until tomorrow to pull together what you'll need. You have any plans for the weekend?

No, why?

You'll see.

Two other things... while you are in my employ, your protection extends both to me and to my family.

I think your boys can take care of themselves. I'm not getting into this to be --

I wasn't referring to *that* family.

This is my daughter, Lynne.

Oh.

Lynne, this is our guest, I believe you've seen him in the news from time to time. He's here to protect us.

You're right, I have seen him in the news, and I wonder if he's here to protect anybody.

You read the Bugle, don't you?

Every day.

I'm sure you'll find him most capable, Lynne. Give him a chance. Now if you'll excuse me, I have to rest, it's been a long day.

All right... good night, father.

Listen, I don't know what you think, but --

My father is a gentle, generous man who trusts people too much. You hurt him and I'll make sure you regret it.

A gentle --

Oh, I forgot the other thing I was going to mention.

You'll have to wear one of these.

What is --

It's a pager.

You want me...you want *me*...to wear a *pager?*

I'm afraid so...it's part of the bargain. After all, I can't exactly count on you simply sensing when I may be in trouble, now can I?

Well, actually --

Good night, Lynne. Sleep tight.

"Don't let the bed bugs bite."

Gotta get it together... can't keep wandering around getting into things before we know what's what and who's who, like that freak in the spider costume.

Only way we're getting our piece of flesh...our piece of Forelli...is by knowing where to hit him, and who we got to worry about. We've been gone a long time... gotta catch up.

Gotta rest, too...feel tired, more tired than we oughta. Maybe that guy did something to us...or maybe we just can't go full bore all the time, or maybe --

Martin and Lewis broke up...?

"Knowledge is what makes the difference between the world you want, and the world other people think you should have."

The three key ingredients in science are observation, analysis, and replication.

You observe what's happening, analyze the possible causes, then attempt to replicate the events to verify that your analysis was correct.

But it all starts with observation.

"It starts with making a conscious effort to be aware of the world around you."

Vietnam? Where the hell is Vietnam?

Because this isn't just about science. It's about developing a mind that examines what you see and hear, from the media, from politicians, heck, even from your teachers --

-- with the understanding that of course ***this*** teacher is always right --

-- so you can critically determine the truth of what you see, hear and believe.

"Otherwise you will find that truth is a constantly shifting concept."

So eight-track tapes are the format of the future...

No, wait, cassettes --

CDs, right, that's the --

DVDs? They're storing music in underwear now? No, that's BVDs, get hold of yourself...

Observation makes you aware of life. So much of the time, we let the moments pass by without really seeing them, appreciating them. We get so caught up in where we're going that we don't see where we are.

A scientist has to think about the future but live in the moment, see the moment.

"Otherwise the world can just pass you by."

We built the biggest towers in the world...and somebody knocked them down?

We elected an actor president?!

Priests are under suspicion and a half-nude singer is called Madonna?

Rock-and-roll? Gas masks in grade schools?

HAS THE WHOLE FREAKING WORLD GONE NUTS?

Forty-six years...we've been gone a long time...a *long* time. A lot's changed.

DAILY NEWS
FORELLI ESCAPES
MURDER FOR HIRE RAP

But some things...some things never change.

Doesn't matter. He's still goin' down.

Goin' down *hard*...

"Are you out of your *mind*?"

It's ten thousand dollars a day.

I know... but look at the source. He's a crook, a criminal, a mob guy --

I know...but the truth is, if I were standing there and somebody came to kill Forelli, I'd have to protect him because...well, that's what I *do*. It's not my place to stand by and let people get killed.

So why *not* let him pay me for what I'd do for free anyway? You know, turn some of that money to the good.

But Peter, it's just --

It's ten thousand dollars a *day*, MJ. Besides, it puts me close to him, and that may help me figure out what's going on and *that* may help me save lives, and...and...

You're doing this for me, aren't you?

No. Absolutely not.

Well, yeah --

Peter --

It'll take me a while until I can afford to get a new apartment big enough for both of us on a teacher's salary, and get you out of this --

-- five-star hotel the Manhattan Register is giving you while you're here shooting their cover.

I want to give you the life you deserve to have. I want you to have everything you ever wanted --

Then like I said: you're out of your mind.

Because the only thing I've ever wanted...

...is you.

But it's still ten grand a day --

VRRRRR VRRRRR VRRRRR

Peter --

Is that a pager in your pocket or are you just happy to see me?

Yeah, it's --

He gave you a *pager*?

I prefer to think of it as high-tech spidey sense.

The text-page said to meet Forelli at the end of pier seven.

From a distance, he looks like an old, tired man staring at the end of his life and the consequence of sins past.

I force myself to remember who and what he was, and still is. Even bad guys grow old.

More's the pity.

Okay, you can start the celebrations, I'm here. So what's the problem?

Look at the water. What do you see?

All the junk that'll wash up on the Jersey shore by morning, just as God intended. Other than that...not much.

Exactly.

One hour ago, there was a boat here.

It came in under cover of darkness. It was from one of our...overseas suppliers.

Drugs or smuggled goods?

I do not deal in drugs. Bad business.

Okay. Smuggling, then. And...?

Do you see a boat here now...?

"The captain radioed in to say they had arrived. Then silence. Minutes later, we received one last message.

"They were screaming.

"Then... silence."

The captain, his crew, they were from Sicily. Half of them did not even know or understand what it was they were carrying. They knew only that it was a good job, a paying job. A chance to see New York.

You are concerned with the safety of innocents, Spider-Man. This I know about you. These men... many of them, not all of them...were innocents.

As is... as is my daughter.

She knows little of what is said about me, and believes less. What I have done in the past... is what I have done. If there was a price to be paid, I was willing to pay it.

It is not right that she should pay the price for my sins.

Not right at all.

I will tell you... as much as I can. You will perhaps understand why I cannot say more.

And perhaps you will understand more than I wish you to understand. It is, unfortunately, a chance I must take.

Do you remember when I asked you if you had plans for the weekend, and you said no?

Yeah...?

"You do now."

"These were dangerous people, Spider-Man. Killers. Hit-men. Gangsters of the old school, back when they still spelled ***gangsters*** the right way.

"I think I...may know where they ended up. Just sources, you understand. It would help me to sleep at night to know they are still...where they were.

"Where they should be."

Excuse me...

...is there anything else you need?

No, I'm fine, thanks.

Are you sure?

Mister Forelli said I was to make sure you had everything and...***any***thing you wanted.

No, I, *uhm*...

That outfit must be ***very*** uncomfortable.

But you can leave the mask on if you like.

Tell the truth, I think it'd be kinda hot, y'know?

So, how's it going with our guest?

Fine...

...just fine.

Just slide the food through the web and nobody gets hurt.

No lines at the airport. No waiting for a car. No fuss, no muss, right into the slickest set of wheels I've ever touched.

The private jets, the money, the women, the style...I begin to understand how a guy can get pulled into this life.

Which just makes it that much scarier, if you ask me.

It *would* be "x-marks-the-spot," wouldn't it? But mob guys aren't exactly known for their imagination.

Does make it a bit harder to find what I'm looking for, though.

HONK! HONK!

What the --

EVEN NINETY YEAR OLD GRAMMAS SAY STOP MESSING AROUND WITH GAMMAS!

NO MORE NUKES

NO TRESSPASSING

GAMMA SHAMMA/ BAN THE BOMB

NO NUKES

Hey... how's it going?

Well, I --

Great dude, where've you been?

No sweat, man. We've been here for days. Always time for new blood to show up, so the rest of us can take a break.

They snuck the first test past the media before we could do anything, but now that we're here, they can't test any more bombs.

The Army boys are pissed, but we're on public land, and they can't do anything until they can get a restraining order, and our guys in town are fighting it all the way.

That's great. I mean, it's a good cause. But what made you think I'm with you? I was just driving and --

C'mon, man, don't play around. We saw what you had.

Ground zero, man.

Ground zero.

The problem with the desert is that there's nothing to swing from.

But like I always say, when life hands you a lemon...

...squirt it in somebody's eye and run like hell.

Question is, what does a test site have to do with where these bodies are supposed to be buried?

Better to be safe than sorry.

-- if you'll come this way, General, we'll show you the latest.

Ever since we found the first tissue samples, we've been carefully digging through the layers, pulling out whatever we can find.

So far we've identified the remains of nearly a dozen people. We're pretty sure all of them were males, but we're still running tests. We also found traces of bullet fragments.

Apparently this used to be some kind of chemical dump, decades ago.

What were the bodies doing here?

Unknown. All we do know is that all these chemicals saturated the skins of the deceased, preserving them against the ravages of time. The desert climate also helped, the heat cooking the chemicals over the course of decades.

When the gamma bomb was detonated above ground, it must have interacted with the chemicals and the preserved organic material and --

And what?

The skin samples we've removed so far from the site have essentially reconstituted themselves. Even absent a heart, or a circulatory system, or oxygen, they continue to survive. We actually can't figure out how to kill the tissue.

But this is what we're worried about the most. As you can see, something dug its way out of the blast crater after the explosion.

Not possible. Nothing could have survived that explosion.

That's correct, sir. Nothing that was alive *before* the blast.

But that doesn't cover something that was dead...or artificially preserved...prior to the blast.

We don't know for sure, but given the missing body parts, it's possible that some of the pieces may have actually merged into one coherent form. Given what it would have taken to dig out from under tons of debris, the gamma burst may have also given it tremendous strength.

Great... just great. That's just what we need...

...a jigsaw-puzzle Hulk that can't be killed because it's already dead...

"...I'd sure hate to meet one of those in a dark alley somewhere."

MARVEL
PG 53

STRACZYNSKI
ROMITA JR
HANNA

the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN®

STAN LEE PRESENTS:

PARTS AND PIECES

-- and you have no *idea* what a relief it is to be able to talk to someone else about Peter's...

Well, about Peter.

I notice you never mention Spider-Man by name. Is there a reason for --

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I still have...a problem with that name, Mary Jane. For so long that name was associated with things that, well, I don't really want to think about.

I know I can't work my way in from that name, and that costume, to find Peter. I'll have to work my way out, from Peter, to that name. He's who I care about, so sooner or later, I know I'll come to care about...the other half of him.

I know what you mean. It took a long time for me to get past that part of it.

So I always make sure to remember that the face on the other side of that mask is the one I would wake up to every morning, that I would kiss every night.

It's been slow since we got back, we're still sort of finding each other, but --

BOOP-BOOP-BOOP-BEEP-BOOP!

The key five notes from Close Encounters. We don't understand it either, but it seems to make her happy.

Sorry, May --

Hello?

-- *the most amazing thing, MJ* --

Peter? Peter, slow down. What's all that noise?

-- a bunch of people protesting the gamma bomb tests, they've been here for days, and Forelli sent me on a private jet, and the flight attendant made a pass at me, then I came all the way out here in the desert --

-- and I found the place where these mob guys were killed back in '57, killed and dumped in an illegal chemical waste dump, so nobody knew there was anything here when they set off the gamma bomb --

-- and I think it may have irradiated the tissues and chemicals and something crawled out of the blast crater, something big and I think it was the thing that's been going after Forelli, calls itself Digger --

-- only Digger's not one thing, not one entity, which is why it had more than one set of fingerprints, it's a composite of thirteen dead mobsters reanimated by gamma ray impulses. So how about *that*, MJ?

Wait a minute... a flight attendant made a *pass* at you?

Hide the breakables, MJ, I'm comin' home.

Home...

They took away our lives. Our names. Our homes.

Home.

Gone.

Gone.

Gone.

Gone.

Everything we were. Everything we had.

Gone.

FUTURE SITE OF Questor Industries

Forelli hired the muscle that pulled the triggers, but he couldn't have done it without the say-so of the other families. So they'll get theirs soon enough.

ONE

But first we start with Forelli.

E 86 ST

ONE WAY

It would be easy to kill him. But that's too quick. He took from us, so now we get to take from him.

Take away his power. His influence. His organization. His money.

6612

Take away everything that matters to him.

Everything.

Everything.

E 96 ST

ONE WAY

"So it sounds to me like Forelli's past sins are catching up to him."

Yeah, it does. I mean, he didn't say he was the one who gave the order to have those guys killed, but then again, he wouldn't.

So what're you going to do about it?

What I promised I'd do.

Digger doesn't care who gets in the way of his vendetta against Forelli. He's already hurt innocent bystanders, killed people...by staying close to Forelli, being his bodyguard, I have a chance to stop this thing.

And then what?

I don't know. I don't know if this thing can be stopped, or killed. And even if that's possible, there's still the issue of who and what Forelli is. He's probably hurt just as many people as Digger, maybe more.

I mean, it's ironic, you know? Digger shows up, and because he's tearing up the place, I can fight him, stop him. But I can't touch Forelli because what he does, he does in secret, behind closed doors. Subtly. Quietly. With an army of lawyers to back him up. It's just --

You're tired.

Yeah... I guess I am.

I should get you back to the hotel before it's too --

No.

No?

Not tonight.

I think it's time, don't you?

It's just...I want it to be right, MJ. No distractions, not when I'm tired, or chasing a case, or --

And will there ever be a day when that happens?

I came back for you, Peter. I love you. For everything you are, for everything you think you're not. Distracted or not, tired or not, you're my lover. My husband. And the dearest thing in the world to me.

Let me prove it.

I can bench press a car.

I can climb up the side of a wall. Fight twenty guys to a standstill. Swing across chasms thirty stories deep. Feel a bullet coming my way and move fast enough to get clear.

But something in her makes me gentle. Makes me shy. Makes me strong. Makes me happy to be alive.

And maybe that's it. Maybe that's what it really comes down to.

She *makes* me. Makes me whole.

She completes me.

So here's the thing, God... I know I complain a lot, and I know that you and me, we've got issues, but right now, just for tonight...

Thank you for her.

Thank you.

-- with Echo Park Baby coming in at the wire to take first place in the third race, paying odds of seven to one. Coming in to place and show are Grandma's Teeth and Silver Seasons --

-- so Forelli says to me, he says take the number. I says to him, I don't need no freakin' number, me and my boys, we can take care of ourselves, right? We been running this casino for years, we pay off the cops, we ain't got no problems we can't handle on our own.

Damn straight. So what'd you tell him?

You know Forelli, he's like an old woman some days. So I finally said, sure, yeah, I'll take the number. But I ain't gonna use it.

What am I, some kinda momma's boy, I gotta call home if I'm in trouble? Geddouttahere. I --

NO...NO... AAAAGGGHHHHH!

CRASSH!

HHAAHH!

Hey, Solly?

Yeah?

I think you better dial the number.

I wanna place a bet.

The bet's on how many of you guys are gonna walk out of here with all your parts and pieces.

Any takers?

I probably should've let MJ know I was heading out on patrol, but I couldn't bear to wake her. I --

BEEP-BEEP BEEP

Uh-oh...

Well, it *was* a great evening...

Huh...this is the address, but it looks pretty quiet. Maybe it's the wrong place?

E 2 ST

1414

ADMITTANCE

ONE WAY

Geddouddatheway!

Move it!

Stop pushing!

I want my money back!

NO ADMITTANCE

Nope. It's definitely the right place.

Hi, the name's Spidey, I'm here to deliver a Singing Strip-O-Gram.

So come on out and play, this thong is killing me.

But what kind of thinger would I be without a killer thong, I athk you?

Uh-oh...

CRUNCH

WHAM!

So when did you start working for Forelli, freak?

What makes you think I'm working for Forelli?

You got here too fast. No police, no sirens. But *you're* here. That tells me you got a call.

So what're you, his latest lap dog?

I'm nobody's lap dog. I just don't like it when people start tearing up parts of my city.

Your city? Or Forelli's turf? TV said there's a robbery across town on twelfth. But you're here. Not there. Protecting his assets, not regular working stiffs.

See, this is how he gets in, gets under your skin. He gets you to do stuff because you think it's okay, nothing illegal...then inch by inch, he turns you.

Turns you until he *owns* you.

You know what Forelli is. If you're what you say you are, then we're all on the same side.

The side of the angels.

The angels? I don't think so. This is about revenge. Revenge for what was done to you.

Because I know who you are.

Who you were.

And what you are.

I know your names. Santo Castellani. Freddie Carnevale. Jimmy *"Little Man"* DeSanti.

Don't say those names...

Tony Mascapone. Louis Fredone --

I SAID DON'T SAY THOSE NAMES!

I wanted to get a reaction.

Well, I got it, all right.

That's it, next time I'm definitely sending flowers instead.

You want a piece of advice? Steer clear of Forelli. Let us do what we have to do. It's none of your business.

Sorry --

-- it's *all* my business.

OOOF!

I was right...

...he's not Hulk strong, but he's pretty close, thanks to the gamma rays. Best to keep this hit-and-run until I figure out a way to stop him. If he gets a good grip, I'm in trouble.

Not that I have the slightest idea yet how to stop somebody who's been dead and back again.

NO ADMITTANCE

But at least the civilians are clear. Now it's just the two of us.

Okay, so if I can't beat him physically one-on-one, that leaves option two: I have to out-think him. Get him mad --

Anybody ever tell you that you fight like a girl? I'm just asking in case there's anything you want to tell the group.

-- then find something to immobilize him. Doesn't matter how strong you are if you can't get a point of leverage to use that strength. So industrial cables might do the trick and I saw a place down the street --

What the --

SNICK-SNACK!

Holy --

Different day.

Same shi--

BRAKKABRAKKABRAKKABRAKKA

NO!

BRAKKABRAKKA

BRAKKABRAKKA

BRAKKABRAKKABRAKKABRAKKA

CRUNCH

TINK TINK

I think we took care of it.

It's nice that you think that way --

-- because I think you may not be right.

Tell... Forelli...

Tell him yourself. Collect. From hell.

...this time... we ain't goin' down that easy...tell him --

BOOM

Okay... that's enough, we're --

AAAGHH!

WE SAID THAT'S ENOUGH!

MOVE IT! HE'S BRINGING THE WHOLE PLACE DOWN!

GET DOWN!

A AVE

AVE

E 2 ST

WAY

Whoa --

Yeah...boss ain't gonna like this. We didn't even hurt him.

Yeah --

1414

NO MAINTENANCE

-- good job keeping him there until we showed up. Good to have you as one of the guys, y'know?

What'd I say?

I told you, you talk too much.

I was just sayin' --

Shuddup.

They were wrong about one thing. They did hurt him. At the end.

I saw it.

Meaning something changed between the time he started fighting me, and the second time they fired.

Something he -- they -- didn't expect either. Just need to figure out what it was.

And this might be just the thing to help me do it.

No time to stick around and answer a lot of questions I wouldn't really want to answer anyway, especially if Lamont is there.

Besides, I have a stop to make along the way.

Funny thing is, I almost feel sorry for him...them...it.

Then I remember what they were in life. How many people they probably killed.

Then all of a sudden I don't mind so much that he was hurt a little.

Except...

6612

...except that I don't like being played for an idiot.

-- and I'll be right there in just a --

You do that again.

Ever.

And you won't have to wait for that thing to take you apart. I'll do it for you. Limb by limb.

I was concerned that you would not do what was necessary to stop him. You do not know what he is capable of. You do not know the kind of things he has done.

You're right. I don't. You do. You know why?

Because you're just like him.

Neither of you cares who gets hurt, who gets caught in the middle of your little wars. The creeps you sent in there didn't even check to make sure there was nobody in the way.

They were told not to hurt you --

That's not the point! Now I'm telling you for the last time, you let me do this my way, so nobody gets hurt, or --

Leave my father alone!

Lynne... you shouldn't be here --

I'm not afraid of him.

Listen, you don't know what you're --

I SAID GET AWAY FROM HIM!

SLAP!

I'm tracking a lead that might give me a way to stop him.

But understand: your guys hurt him, and if I were him, I'd be looking to hurt you back.

You, and the people you care about.

What should I --

Keep the pager number close. Keep her indoors. Sleep lightly. And one other thing --

-- the price is now twelve grand a day.

He's a terrible man, father. You shouldn't have anything to do with him.

Lynne --

I know what he thinks of you, the same everybody else does. But I know who you are. I know you're a good man. You shouldn't have to put up with such people.

You're better than that...you shouldn't have to --

Wait --

I'm sorry --

No, Lynne. I'm not better than that. I deserve exactly what I'm getting.

"You're the one who doesn't deserve this. I was always afraid my past would come to haunt you some day. But I always believed I could stop it, whatever it was. That I could take care of you.

"I was wrong. I need him. For you. For protection against my sins. I can't protect you against something like this. Only he can."

I'm sorry... I'm so sorry... God... God help me...

MARVEL
PG 54

STRACZYNSKI
ROMITA JR
HANNA

the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN®

SUGAR

TRY IT

CKEL

S

THEATRE

FOX

ON DUTY

TERRY DODSON RACHEL

Now that I had a sample of Digger's tissue, I'd finally be able to get some kind of idea what I was up against...other than a living-dead compilation of thirteen dead Mafia types missing since 1957 and now reunited in one big, green, gamma-irradiated, nearly-Hulk-strong body looking for revenge against the guy who gave the order to kill them.

Same-old same-old....

Stan Lee Presents:

THE BALANCING OF KARMIC ACCOUNTS

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PRYCE MEDICAL REASEARCH

Unfortunately, the kind of places that do this kind of testing aren't open for another four hours, and I can't wait that long.

And even if they were, I couldn't afford the tests anyway.

Y'know, that's what the super-hero community really needs. A good medical plan. Something we could deduct.

I mean, if Captain America can have a red, white and blue shield, why can't the rest of us just have Blue Shield? And why am I always the one who has to think of these things?

Because I spend too much time in self-examination, that's why. You think the Rhino worries about getting his tusk insured? Nope. It's just me, because I worry about these things.

Maybe I worry too much.

Great, something *else* to worry about.

Well, at least this shouldn't take long.

Interesting...the sample reflects the same diversity Lamont found in the fingerprints. Each finger had a different print, and the blood sample shows every possible blood type, all working together.

Which is, of course, impossible.

Only the excessive gamma radiation is holding them together, keeping the cells from rejecting each other.

So that may be the way to--

KLIK!

Nuts...

Okay, so you start cleaning that end, I'll take it over here.

If you'd done this last night like I told you, we wouldn't have to get up early. I hate getting up early.

You know what I hate most about getting up early? I hate waking up and looking at the clock and knowing the alarm's gonna go off in five minutes, so there's no point in going back to sleep, waiting for the stupid alarm to go off, and it's still freakin' dark outside--

--and all I can do is just lay there and stare at the--

--ceiling...?

You know you're not supposed to look up here until a second after I'm gone, right?

So? What're you waiting for? Say something...

I won't say anything.

But I want an autograph, and a picture of you signing it.

Hey, Rob, I thought you'd be done in here by now. Rob?

Hey, Rob, you know you're not supposed to use the computers, man--

Later. Right now, nothing's getting between me and eBay, *nothing*...

--and the more I think about it, MJ, the more it all adds up.

Good... I'm glad it all...adds up... whatever it all is...

What time did you say it was again?

Six-thirty. Do you like the waffles? I nuked them in the microwave myself.

It's not that I don't *like* having breakfast with you, Peter, I do, really, and I can see you're excited about all this...whatever...

Gamma-irradiated bloodwork.

Yeah... that...

And I was having the best dream...I was dreaming about sleeping in today....

The gamma radiation isn't just making him strong, it's literally keeping him together. But the strain on his system must be enormous.

Which ties into something I've suspected for a very long time.

I think that's a wonderful dream, don't you think that's a wonderful dream...?

SEPT 2

Everybody's heard about the Hulk being able to change back and forth to Bruce Banner. But some of us noticed a long time ago that Big Green used to disappear all of a sudden, and we'd see some guy in a torn pair of pants running away for all he's worth.

We didn't talk about it a lot, 'cause we all have things we don't want other people to know about, but still--

I always wondered if there was some kind of trigger mechanism. Because if the change was tied to an energy discharge, it stands to reason that when it's used up, the Hulk goes dormant to recharge until something builds up again, maybe adrenaline, which would be key to a biochemical reaction like that.

Difference is, Digger doesn't have any way to go dormant and recharge. He can rest, which probably helps, but over time, he'll just keep losing energy.

That may be why he got loopy all of a sudden in our last fight.

And all this is complicated by having to keep so many diverse blood types and organs from rejecting each other.

That's nice, Peter.

Did you say you microwaved the waffles? Is that why they're turning to goo?

Not that goo is a bad thing, I know you tried, why some of my best friends are goo...

I think all I have to do is wear him out, keep after him until he runs out of juice.

Just have to make sure he doesn't kill me before that happens.

Right... absolutely... whatever you said, I support it.

It's so great being able to talk to you about this stuff again, MJ. I know other people might find the scientific stuff boring, but you've always been so supportive.

Hmm.

I am... absolutely...

...ZZZZZZZZZZ...

I love you. Sorry to wake you up.

...s'okay I was getting up anyway...

...love you too...

There are moments when I'm glad I have a spider on my chest.

The heavy embroidery is the only thing keeping my heart from exploding out through my chest right now.

Time to get to work.

Just one more stop to make on the way.

160

Thanks, Jake, see you tomorrow.

Sure thing! Maybe next time you'll leave a tip!

We're both public servants, Jake. It's a rough life and nobody appreciates us.

PUGLIESE'S COFFEE SHOP

SQUINCH

Squinch?

Did you like it? Tell me you liked it. I thought it was very subtle.

You know my car insurance doesn't cover this kind of stuff, right?

Funny, I was thinking about that sort of thing just last night; you want me to tell you all about it?

No.

Yaun

"Just thought I could come to you in my hour of need, Lamont--

"--even though technically it's a lifetime of need, but I bet you've got problems of your own, right?"

"Shaddup."

"Is that how people from your planet say good morning?"

'morning....

You didn't sleep last night.

No... no, I didn't.

Dad, you're going to make yourself sick over this. You can't afford that. Your health--

My health is the least of my concerns right now, Lynne. It's you I'm worried about.

I can take care of myself, you shouldn't worry--

Yes, he should.

I need to talk to you, Forelli.

Privately.

Yes, of course. Lynne, would you--

Certainly.

But I still think this...man... is the last person in the world who can keep either one of us safe.

You're such a sweet talker.

Spider-Man...

Right.

Did you get it?

Yes...a cashier's check for the money I owe you so far, for your services.

I made it out to cash, since you wouldn't tell me your name--

It'll do.

So much for "heroes."

Now, if you want my advice, you'll get out of this place, right now.

Get out? Leave? That's not much return on my investment.

I'm not here to be a dividend, I'm trying to save your life.

"If I'm right, your enemy is running out of time. That means he's going to be getting desperate. Desperation means he may decide to start cutting out the middle-men and come right to you."

But you can stop him--

I think so, yes. But it'd be easier for me if you weren't here.

And if you were straight with me about why he--they--keep coming after you.

"It's obvious this is personal. This is a vendetta. He's settling a grudge the only way he knows how. In blood."

I--

We're running out of time here, Forelli. Level with me.

I...

"...don't know what you're talking about. I'm a legitimate businessman. Ask anyone."

We don't have time for lies. If there's anything you know that can help me stop this thing--

Look, I hired you to do a job, now if you can't do it--

I can't do it if you don't give me all the facts!

"I'm sorry, that's all I can tell you. The rest... is my business."

Your business is about to get you killed. It--

Uh-oh--

EEEEEE!

STAY HERE!

Lynne! Ohmygod...

Gonna take our payment in blood...we never killed a woman before... first time for everything...

Including getting your butt kicked--

--by your friendly, neighborhood Spider-Man.

Note the hyphenated form, very important when you fill out your information for the prison board.

NRRH!

Get going... hurry!
I--
Now!
No!
Sorry--
--I think this is my dance, handsome.
NOOO!
You don't understand... you don't know what he *did*--
Yes, I do--
He killed us...you're protecting a murderer.
You oughta know.
Seems to me that since everybody who makes up whatever the heck you are was a stone killer, you probably got what you had coming in the first place.
There was a truce...
You really don't get it, do you? I don't give a damn about your truce, or your vendetta, or anything else.
Nobody kills people on my watch. Not even a lowlife like Forelli. Besides, whatever he may be, his daughter's not part of it.
I know...

That's why it'll make it sweet when I snap her neck in front of him. Now get *outta my way*--

No, he's right.

Your quarrel is with me. I'm the one who gave the order for all thirteen of you to be murdered. I was the one who went to the Commission for approval. Your problem's with me. Just...leave her out of it.

Forelli... you got stupid when you got old. Whether you die first or second, you're both dying.

NOBODY'S GETTING OUT OF HERE ALIVE! NOBODY!

Get going! I'll cover you!

But--

I mean it!

Because one of us isn't leaving this room in one piece!

There are times the spider in me gets out of the way of the scientist, when I have to figure out how to beat somebody.

And times the scientist has to get out of the way of the spider. The hunter. The part of me that enjoys this.

Enjoys doing the things that only I can do...precisely ***because*** I'm the only one who can do them. I can stop him. Them. I know it.

The scientist started this investigation. Got me this far.

Now the spider has to finish it.

Just got to keep wearing him down until he --

Look, what the hell do you think you're protecting, anyway? You wanna know what we think of the world you built while we were away? It stinks.

Yeah, guys like us, we were trouble. But the streets were clean, and you went to dinner at a club in a nice suit, and kids respected you, and everybody knew the world was gonna be even better tomorrow than it was today. Everybody. You get that, freak?

"Now whaddya got? Crap music about kids shooting kids like it was a good thing, stupid-looking baggy pants, lousy service, nobody thinks the world's gonna get any better, and there's no way out."

It's jammed...that's why he damaged the load-bearing wall upstairs...we can't get out!

A world like this deserves to be put out of its misery. Starting with Forelli. Kill the old sins before you start in on the new ones, y'know?

Well? You got anything to say about that, freak?

Spider.

I tear into him--them--with everything I've got. He stopped fighting to gain time. That means he's getting tired. Can't let up for even a second now.

Sonuva... leggo...get *offa* me...I said *get off* --

AAAAGGGGHHH!

MY ARM!

What the hell...what's happening to me?

What I hoped was gonna happen when I exhausted the gamma radiation that brought you all back and knit you together.

You're going to pieces.

Now to make sure he doesn't get away to recover, and put him out in the open, where I can do the most damage.

Listen, it's awfully warm in here, so would you mind opening the window for me?

Thanks ever.

NO! FORELLI!

NOOOO!

NO PARKING WAY

Gonna kill you...gonna kill...

OWF!

KILL YOU!

How's it going?

Swell... did you know you have cactus growing in this garden?

My idea.

Somehow I just knew it.

No... damn it...

Got to go after him. Finish this.

CLANNNNG!

End of the line.

Heh...you know how many times we've used that line? But it takes a certain kinda guy to finish the job. You got the stones for that, freak?

You can't kill what's already dead. All you can do...is undo the mistake that did this.

We'll see...either way, I win...

We got ambushed...cut down...never had a chance. If this ends... we're goin' down... standin' up.

AAAAARRRRGGHHHH!!!

I swear, they both went right down there, they --

WHOA!

Go back to the void. Go back to 1957.

Go to hell.

"You're sure he's...it's... dead?"

Because we lost you once you went into the sewer.

They're gone.

No thanks to the NYPD.

6612

POLICE

NYPD CORON

My attorney will be filing a complaint first thing tomorrow. Because of the NYPD's failure to protect my life and property I had to hire outside help, which demonstrates negligence and prejudicial enforcement and --

Hey Sunshine...before you go any further, there's something you oughta hear.

Hey Willie...play it.

Sure thing, Lieutenant.

CLICK

...Whrrrrr... *Your quarrel is with me. I'm the one who gave the order for all thirteen of you to be murdered. I was the one who went to the Commission for approval. Your problem's with me. Just...*

Okay, Willie, that'll do.

But how--

213

He asked to wear a wire, figured he could get you to say something incriminating. You did. And there's no statute of limitations on murder, Forelli.

One dead monster, one busted mobster. Where I come from, we call this a two-fer.

Read him his rights, Dave.
Yes, sir.
No! You animals! Leave him alone! *Daddy!*
It's like I told you. Nobody kills anybody on my watch. What you did, the murders you ordered, led to this. Fixing the current problem was never going to be enough. Time to pay up, Forelli. Long past time.
Maybe... maybe so....
I swear, we'll get you the best lawyers in town... tell them you didn't do this... you couldn't have done this....
Y'know, I almost feel sorry for her.
She slapped me.
Then she's definitely my kind of woman.
Ask you a question? The cashier's check for what he paid me to work as part-time bodyguard... is that legal?
If he goes into a store and buys a bagel, it's a legal transaction. Where the money came from isn't the issue, and if we could prove it was illegal we would've gotten him on evasion years ago. So basically, consider yourself a bagel.
You didn't do anything illegal, the check's good, the money's been laundered so good that all the presidents' faces got chafed...the money's yours. Just as long as somebody declares it on tax day. Anything else?
Yeah... was *this* my coffee, or was *that* my coffee?
Forget it, I ain't taking the chance.
Me either.
For all I know, if I drink from the same cup as you, I might end up a costume myself.
The Annoying Lame-Man... I like it.
Shove it...

I don't think I've ever seen anyone's eyes get that big before. When you handed her the check --

Yeah, that was pretty funny.

Doesn't happen every day.

Nope.

Something I've been wondering... when you put the whole gamma radiation thing together with the Hulk's need to change back and forth by how tired or angry he was...I got the impression it was something you've thought about before.

I mean, you're a fast thinker, but I can tell when you've been thinking about things for a while.

TAP TAP TAP-TAP

Yeah, it's...

Look, every so often, one of us gets taken over, or controlled, or messed up by one of the bad guys. When that happens, it's up to the rest of us to stop it.

TAP-TAP-TAP

Everybody in our odd little community would deny it, but we all watch each other when we cross paths, looking for weaknesses, in case that day ever comes.

In case they ever have to stop me...or I ever have to stop them. But we never talk about it. Ever.

So in that case... you must've thought about how to beat the Hulk.

That's right.

So does that mean you've figured out how to beat him? I--

Ow!

Hit my thumb. Hurts like a --

You're not getting out of it that easy, Peter. Could you beat him? Could you really beat the Hulk?

Yeah. Yeah, I could.

But the only way to do it, to really stop him, would be to kill him.

I hope I don't ever have to make that decision, MJ. And I don't even want to think about it. Not now. Not on a day like this.

No. Not on a day like this. It's nice to be able to put something bad to a good use.

Best money you've ever spent, Peter. I'm proud of you.

EST 1919

FUTURE SITE OF THE GWEN STACY MEMORIAL LIBRARY

And she'd be proud of you too.

I hope so, MJ.

I love you.

I know.

But it still hurts, doesn't it?

Always will, MJ. Always will.

End.

MARVEL
PG 55

AVERY
STRACZYNSKI
ROMITA JR
HANNA

the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN®

STAN LEE PRESENTS:

Unintended Consequences

I thought I was free of the school jitters when I graduated. But damned if old Mr. Myers still doesn't freak me out when I'm late for faculty meetings. When I came back to teach I was sure he was dead by now.

Instead it's just an incredible simulation. Dead-A-Mania. Get your tickets now.

Aren't you guys late for class?

260TH UNION TPK

We aren't in school anymore, pal, so get stuffed.

See ya around, Melissa. If I hear anything, I'll let you know.

What about you?

Like you said, I'm late for class. You wanna make something of it?

So I'm supposed to believe you're just tardy and that you weren't planning on ditching with the others?

No, I --

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Sheesh! Forget it. I wouldn't expect an old nerd like you to understand.

Old?!

I see you didn't argue with the nerd part.

Old?!

Look, unless you plan on taking me to the Vice Principal's office so he can give me detention or something, I can make it to class just fine alone.

You still haven't convinced me you're just late. What were you doing with those other guys anyway?

It's just hard getting around on these crutches, 'kay? I was getting some help but I hadda wait till they were done lighting up.

Why don't your parents give you a ride to school?

You're just gonna make me more late. I wish you'd have just busted me or something. Later.

Just a minute, young lady.

I have a name. Melissa. I'd rather you used it.

Okay, Melissa. I have an obligation as a teacher in this school to see you safely to class.

Fine, yeah, whatever.

So who's your home room teacher?
Mr. Myers.
Oh, great.
You sound like you know him pretty well. Shouldn't he be dead by now?
I do, he isn't, and actually, this could work out well for both of us...
So, on final review of Mark Twain, we find he was quite a forward thinker and...
Melissa Coolridge! That's *another* tardy point to work off after school.
Peter? What're you...
Sorry I missed the faculty meeting, sir. But I thought it best to help this student to her first class.
You were her escort?
Yes. She was late because of her crutches, and I was late because I was her escort. So we're both clear. Sorry to interrupt your lecture.
Very well...nevermind the tardy mark, Melissa. With help of this calibre, I'm surprised you were even able to find the building.
Laugh all you want, Myers, someday you're gonna have to use the men's room in a hurry, and I'm gonna get there before you.
And web the door shut.

Good afternoon, Maude. Looking beautiful as always.

Oh Peter, you lie beautifully, darling, have ever since the ninth grade, so don't stop.

What can I do for you today?

I'd like to see the records for a Melissa Coolridge.

Let's see, here. Any particular reason for this one?

Just curious.

Not another one of your pet projects!

What's wrong with that?

Nothing wrong. Just with all the extracurricular things you do for these kids, do you ever get to sleep?

I've learned something about sleep. You don't need much of it.

You sound like my grandfather. He said the same thing when he was ninety-seven.

I am not old!

I am not old!

I am not old!

And I'm not a nerd, either.

Just, y'know... in case.

Ah, here it is.

Remedial reading? There's nothing remedial about that girl. She's got a very sharp wit and she's got a pretty solid vocabulary.

-P.S. 108 PERSONAL RECORDS -

COOLRIDGE, MELISSA
103-20 217 IN
QUEENSVILL, N.Y.
11242

COMMENTS -

01	ENGLISH 101	FRENZKE
02	SCIENCE: BIOLOGY 101 HON	PARKER
	Remedial Reading - Am Lit	-Myers
03	HISTORY 101	SERGER
04	SOCIAL STUDIES -	RAMBLE
	MATH 101	
	HEALTH	

Yep, here we go, I can see another stray being taken in. Let me see those papers.

She failed her final exam in regular Lit last semester. So she's had to take the remedial to make up for it. Poor thing.

I remember her now. She was really upset about dropping the Honors Bio. She had to take an extra P.E. course just to keep her units up.

Which means she'll be on the sidelines in P.E. all semester with that leg of hers.

Hmm...

Thanks, Maude! I owe you.

Sure thing, Peter. Feel free to come by and lie to me anytime.

It'll make me nostalgic for my last two marriages...

P.S. 108

CHAMPIONS

93-94

C'mon, Melissa, it's not *that* bad.

Easy for *you* to say. You're not the one on the sidelines or walking on crutches all day, Joy.

I really don't wanna be here. Coulda skipped all day. Those idiots smoked too close to campus.

You got caught?

Mmm.

You gotta do detention?

Nah. Some other teacher came and helped me to class. Even told Myers he was helping me and that's why I was late.

Wow, nice.

He was just covering his own butt because he was late for the faculty meeting. You can't trust teachers.

Joy! Switch out with Marsha!

'Kay!

See ya, Mel.

Melissa, you can go ahead and dress for class. But I wanna see you after the bell.

Great... *now* what?

You realize that you're gonna be on the sidelines all semester.

Yeah, I know.

Good. Because you have an option, and you should be properly grateful.

I had a visit by Mr. Parker, who teaches Honors Bio this semester. He said he'd take you for the second half of the term if you wanna switch out.

Honors Bio?!? He really said that?

I think it's a good idea. Then, this summer, you can come back and train for basketball again.

All right! I'm *so* there!

Give this form to Miss Stevens in the Guidance Office and report to Honors Bio tomorrow.

Thanks!

This is the best thing that's happened to me all semester!

The Next Day...

NYC PDA

PS 108

LAB 5

BIOLOGY

You again! I should've known this was all too good to be true!

Why don't you take the desk up front by the door? It's available.

BREEEEEEEEEEEEE

As we go through the lesson plan, I find that my instinct was right about her. She's a natural. Quick. Bright. Intuitive.

She has one of those rare minds that enjoys taking in things it doesn't understand and wrestling them into submission.

She's got potential.

I just hope she has the chance to realize it.

Need some help with that?

I can do it.

I know you can do it, but I'm the one who gave you all the extra books for class.

Where are your parents? Can't they pick you up after school?

Why do you care?

Why do you put up such a fight that I care?

Because it seems pretty weird, you going out of your way on my account.

And I think there's something weird about people who have to think there's something weird about people who are weird enough to pay attention to your situation and want to help out.

That's an awful lot of weirds in one sentence, yo.

Yeah...I think I blew out a neuron or two with that one.

Okay, then...

If you're really serious about this, then you can carry *both* my bags!

I do... but we still gotta walk slow.

Oof! Great... I hope you live close by...

Right...

One hour later.

Here we are! Home sweet home.

Let no one say you don't exert all effort in your studies...

It's good that I can still act the part of under-developed nerd after all these years. MJ would be proud of my acting skills.

Uhm... Melissa...

CRASH!!

What the-- ?

What am I gonna do? If it's a robbery, I can't whip out the webs here without causing a scene.

Melissa-- *stop!*

Hey! You can't do that!

Check it! One of 'em's home!

I smell lunch money.

You want trouble? Bring it on.

That so?

Excuse me...

I'll have you know I have a cell phone, and I'm not afraid to use it.

This is how you plan on protecting me? You *are* a geek!

Nerd.

What *EVER*.

Oh, no...

He's got Mom's *locket!* Give it back!

Try it and I'll--

Drop it. We weren't told to rough anyone up. Let's jet!

Don't let him take my mom's locket! Please, it's all she has from my grandmother!

Whoa--

HEY!

Oops! Ack!!

Damn, that girl's dangerous! But this works out perfectly.

Oops! Sorry! Coming though! Heavy reading! Whoa! My bad!

Now can I call 9-1-1?

30 minutes later...

I don't know what I would have done if you hadn't been escorting Melissa home. I really appreciate everything, Mr. Parker.

You can call me Peter, she's the one who has to call me Mr. Parker.

Oh how rude-- between the police report and the crutches, I haven't introduced myself. I'm Laura Coolridge.

It's a pleasure. Are you Melissa's only support right now? I noticed you were working late.

Yes, I'm a single mother. Melissa's older brother Jack is-- is--

He's in jail. That vigilante creep Spider-Man nabbed him a few months ago for supposedly stealing a car.

Melissa!

Is this... Jack?

Yes. His high school graduation photo.

Do you know him?

I just realized the time. I'm late for dinner.

Oh, you're married?

She's waiting for me at our favorite spot. Glad you got home okay, Melissa.

See you tomorrow at school.

Mel, come inside. It's dinner time.

He knows something about Jack, I know it.

Mel, come in and close the door! I'm not gonna pay to heat the neighborhood!

5 minutes later...

Hey, Tiger, you're actually on time! If you keep doing that, how am I going to know it's you?

Fingerprints, I guess...

Sorry... distracted. How was your day?

Obviously not as hellish as yours. What's up?

I... I think I'll be working *"late"* tonight, MJ.

Oh? Something wrong? You look upset.

I tell her about it. All of it--from helping Melissa at school, to taking out the thugs at her home, hearing how her mom eked out a living, and then realizing I put her older brother away for carjacking a few months earlier.

So, if you helped ***make*** the problem, I guess you kinda have to ***fix*** it.

I didn't ***say*** I made the problem.

Nope. You didn't.

Nuts...

30 Minutes later, across town...

We still got a lot of good stuff though. Ought to take care of the back-rent, easy.

Would be this kid's first pay-back too.

But I really didn't like losing my teeth.

I say we let the old landlord here decide if we go back and rough anyone up. Then he won't beat us up for beating anyone up we shouldn't have...

How was business today?

We, er-- it wasn't great, but we made your money back.

Where's Rudolpho? I wanna hear this out.

Went to pawn some of his stuff off.

So that being the case--

--anybody want to pay to buy this back?

Thweet Jethuth!

You guys ever think about looking behind you once in a while? Just, y'know, in case there's a friendly neighborhood Spider-Man following?

MMMMMMMMMMMFFFMMMMM!

What have you guys done...? Did you lead him here?

I'd appreciate it if you didn't leave until I said what I came to say.

Ack!

Take care of him!
Great, now no one's gonna listen.
I thought we could negotiate.
All I'm asking for is a quick audience.
Are you hearing me?
Guess not.
Look, all I'm saying is --
I won't come calling if you --
--if you don't go calling on people who can't defend themselves.
All right?
I knew no one was listening.

So that leaves you.

What?? What the hell do you want?!

No-- no, don't!

I want you to leave your tenants alone. Stop harassing them. Every time you harass them, we will play thump.

Thump?

I web you to the ceiling. The webbing lasts just a few hours. Then it dissolves. When it dissolves, gravity says hello and... thump.

Is that fair enough...

HUGH BENJAMIN MULLER
LANDLORD *REAL
WITH FIRST A

... Mr. Muller?

I take my time walking back. Every so often, it's good to handle something like this.

A clean case. Kid in trouble, mom in trouble, bad guys I can play thump with... no ambiguity. Except --

Except for that part about me jailing her brother.

You carry the weight of the world on your shoulders, Peter. It's too big a burden for anyone. Trust me on this one.

We haven't had time to chat in quite a long time, so I thought I'd drop by and see how you were doing. You don't exactly stick around.

Funny, Ezekiel. I thought you were the one who went off to Africa.

Which is nowhere near a subway station, I might add.

Obviously you haven't checked the latest maps. You'd be surprised what the government builds in the night when no one's looking.

So, you want to tell me what's got your brow furrowed?

It's... hard to explain.

Try me.

You ever hear of the Doctrine of Unintended Consequences?

I read a book once. That wasn't it.

Tell somebody you love them, or hit them, and you can't foresee all the possible consequences. You do "A" because it's a good thing. But "A" has consequence "B" which is a bad thing for somebody else.

Sometimes I focus so much on what I'm doing right now to fix something, that I forget even bad guys have families.

And if they're not around to take care of those families... what happens to them? Who looks after them?

Good question. I'll try to find a good answer.

Answer?

Ezekiel?

Just to make sure those guys got the right lesson, I swing by the area while I'm on patrol.

She's a dreamer. I'd hate for those dreams not to come true someday.

I don't know how to fix it. I don't know how to give her that future.

But that doesn't mean I'm going to stop trying.

To be continued...

MARVEL

PSR 56

AVERY

STRACZYNSKI

ROMITA JR

HANNA

the AMAZING SPIDER-MAN®

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES II OF II

BRRRINNGG

P.S. 108

BIOLOGY

Good morning, Mr. Parker!

...mrmph...

I'm ready to kick that exam in the posterior gluteus today! Gluteus maximus! See? I studied.

...thzniz...

Thzniz...?

That's nice.

You don't look so good.

Why not? You up watching TV all night?

I didn't get much sleep, Melissa...

Yeah... that must be it...

It's nothing a little sleep wouldn't fix.

STAN LEE PRESENTS: THE REVOLUTION WITHIN

STORY BY FIONA AVERY and J. MICHAEL STRACZYNSKI
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JOHN ROMITA JR. - PICTURES
SCOTT HANNA - INKS
DAN KEMP - COLORS
VIRTUAL CALLIGRAPHY'S RANDY GENTILE - LETTERS
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Better still, maybe a whole weekend's worth of sleep. To make up for eight nights spent watching out for her...

She gets in more trouble than any other kid her age could ever dream up.

All because she's looking for her brother, Joshua, who disappeared right after he got out of jail. A guy I helped put away.

CARTING

So, you guys said you know some folks who might know where my brother is.

Yeah, we asked 'em. They said they'd meet us here if you got a pic.

I have a picture of him taken not too long ago. I don't know if he's cut his hair or what...

They're pretty rowdy guys, you should probably have left it to us.

No way. This is about family and I have a responsibility here. Mom's really taking it hard...

...and if I don't find him, who will?

Oh boy... here it comes...

The cops sure as hell aren't any help and--

Well, now. Seems you came right on time, just like they told you to.

Hey, whoa, what's the problem--?

Your brother split on us before he paid us what he owes for some of the junk we sold him. When we heard you were looking for him, we figured, well, if we couldn't find him, we could always get it from you.

Yep. It's a setup. Damn!

But I can't just dive in without letting Melissa know I've been watching.

What to do...? What to do...?

You look scared. Good.

I ain't scared of you.

Yeah, he's not scared of you--

Don't help.

CRASH BLANG!

The hell is--!

THUD-CLANG!

AAAAAH!

Holy--

Let's go! Move! Get out of here!

You see anything out there, Harold?

Harold's an idiot, he never sees anything.

What's all the racket? What? What?

See?

C'mon, Mel.

Thanks!

One more crisis averted. I'll let the neighborhood deal with these guys. I gotta keep my eye on Melissa.

Tomorrow I'll figure out some way to keep her out of trouble at least for one night so I can be alert, and awake, and get some serious investigation work done. Shouldn't be that much to ask for...

BIO 5

G GRIFTON

...and the coefficient, over here, relates to the numeral over here by... well, it doesn't, they don't get along, but--

Mr. Parker?

Mr. Parker, the bell rang a minute ago! *YO!*

It did?

Oh, yeah. It did. Sorry.

You got a fever or something?

Or is this just another geek trait? Daydreaming in Biology 101 about atomic cell subdivisions or something...

Don't you have another class to go to?

Yeah, I do. But I was trying to get your attention for a reason.

I want to talk to you--*after* school.

What? Am I in *trouble?*

Something like that. See ya.

Great, just serve me detention already. At least I could get some sleep.

Later, after school...

So what did you want to see me about?

What do you know about Joshua?

I...

I saw your reaction to his picture.

Nuts...the only reason I recognized him was because I was the one who turned him over to the police.

Well, I mean, I've seen him around, and...

So *you're* the creep who flunked him out of senior bio, *huh*? *You're* the reason he ended up on the streets.

That's why you...I mean, no, I--

That's why you've been trying to be nice to me, to make up for being a creep.

No, that wasn't me. I haven't been teaching that long. I just started here this semester.

Oh.

...you know, if he hadn't flunked senior bio, he'd have been a high school honors student. When he failed that class, he graduated, sure, but he didn't get to go to college.

Sorry to hear that.

He'd probably be a whole 'nother story if he met someone like you in school. Sorry for being mad, Mr. Parker.

Well, anyway, I'd better get inside and crack open the books.

Right. See you in class tomorrow.

If I don't sleep through class again, that is...I wonder if I could get Miss Dickens to substitute for me tomorrow. She doesn't have a life either. I could use a whole day's sleep. I--

Wait. Aren't those the guys Melissa was hanging with last night?

I told Mel there's a few spots we can check out before I get back to my usual all-nighter. It's a pain, but she's persistent, y'know?

Oh great.

Hey guys, thanks for waiting! I had to ditch my teacher. Anyway, I only have 'til six o'clock 'cause then Mom's home between shifts for dinner--so let's get going!

"Ditch my teacher"?!

At least she's only gonna be out until 6 p.m. But I can't just follow them around like this. Gotta try another approach.

Well, there is one option available to me to keep her caged in overnight at least.

If I don't find out where her brother is, she's gonna get herself into more trouble. And I can't keep this up forever.

One slightly illegal action and thirty minutes later...

I start at the ***courthouse*** because someone there must have access to records about Joshua Coolridge. I need to find out when he was paroled and what address or other information was on his parole papers when he left jail--and I don't have a lot of time before the courthouse closes.

The woman at the counter isn't exactly helpful. It was a lot easier getting information as a photographer for the paper. These days, "Science Teacher for High School Kids" doesn't allow me to swing my weight around properly...

Joshua Coolridge was released on good behavior by Judge Simon. That's all I can tell you. I will not divulge other parts of his record such as street address, when he was released or any other personal information.

Can you tell me where he's staying now?

I have no information on his current whereabouts. Only his parole officer would know, but he wouldn't release it either. That's strictly ***confidential*** material.

So, ***that*** expedition was about as helpful as snot.

Ezekiel?

Peter. Hello.

What are ***you*** doing here?

Just attending to some legal matters, nothing serious. Par for the course when running a business. You?

Ah right, him. Interesting case. Well, best of luck to you.

I'm looking up that guy I told you about the other day.

Yeah, you too...

I don't believe him, but a man is entitled to his own private life, after all. Besides, I have important stuff to attend to tonight and--

Wait a minute. "Interesting case"...?

But as usual, he's gone. Now I know how it feels when I do that to people.

Maybe it was nothing.

Hey MJ, it's me. I'm gonna be working late again tonight, but I think this should be the beginning of the end.

Hey, you got that part? Great! Listen, I'm gonna be on the Spidey phone tonight--

What? What's wrong with calling it the Spidey phone? I mean I'm not gonna be on this one, okay? You have the number for the other phone. Right. Feel free to call me. No, it's okay, I have it set to buzz before it rings. Right, bye!

*HORAN'S PL

It was time to do some old-fashioned journalistic investigation.

A few of my journalist pals used to frequent this place, because there was one particularly good informant who used to hang out inside.

I started checking with him for leads on Spider-Man. That way if anybody suspected anything, started asking around if I was doing my job, I had him to confirm that I was checking around, which I wouldn't do if I *were* Spider-Man.

I live a complicated life.

Yo, Pete! Long time no see! What'll it be?

A tomato juice.

One tomato juice coming up, ya stud.

Hello, Peter. It's been a while.

I've been out of the journalism rounds for a bit.

Need something, I take it?

I'm looking for a kid by the name of Joshua Coolridge. He left jail on parole but the courthouse isn't being friendly about it, and I can't find out where he went.

Thanks, Bill.

No problem. It's on the house.

One: back to what he was doing before.

Car-jacking. Not there.

Two: worse crime circles. Like the mafia, I'd say. If he's going for something higher than grand theft auto, that would be it.

My gut tells me no on that one. What's the third option?

There are only three places for a thug to go after jail...

Oh, the third option...

We don't talk about the third option...

So if I tell you about it, you never heard it from me.

That's fine. Not like I know who you are anyway, with that newspaper and all. Plus, I can make the information well worth your while.

There's a place, downtown, outside the fashion district, where a lot of different gangs are congregating. No one knows what the hell is goin' down, but it's gonna be big. I tell you about it only because you said this guy just got out of jail. A lot of the guys coming into this place were jailed and just recently let out-- or escaped. It's bad mojo down there.

Thanks, I'll see about it.

Don't say I didn't warn you.

First, I check in on Melissa.

She's a bright kid, so I worried that webbing her bedroom window wouldn't be enough to keep her safely inside for the night.

BANG! WHACK! SHUDDER!

Guess I didn't need to worry.

Mel? What are you *doing* in there?

BANG! WHACK! SHUDDER!

Nothing! Just remembered to write something down for class tomorrow! 'Nite, Mom!

It's not permanent webbing on the window. It ought to wear off when she's twenty-one.

Now it's time for some real adventure.

Without the babysitting part.

I did some more digging in the underworld and double checked the information my contact at the bar gave me...

And all arrows pointed to the same part of town...

Finding the right building turns out to be easier than I thought.

ALBERTS coast to coast
ALBERTS

It's the only one that's radiating "criminality" as brightly as the red-light district a few blocks away.

This looks too big to bust, plus I have no idea what they're actually doing.

I need a better look. Even if it's just a meeting where I can assess what they're up to, at least I'll get a good look at their faces and see if Mel's brother's here.

GREEEEEAK

Balcony seats... Looks like the show is about to start.

We accept that there are legitimate *causus belli*...

The Man is an identifiable human type, but on an unidentifiable scale. He is an enormous stirrer--a titanic mixer.

Causus belli? I have never heard guys like ***this*** use language like ***that*** before. In fact, I don't even know what the hell it means!

Okay this is tripping me out. Is this some kinda language for a massive takedown about to occur?

Look how he's shaken us up.

One could say, countervailingly, that when we said yes to this mission, we were truly visited by something very alien and unbelievably radical.

Keep your cool, and look for Joshua out there somewhere...

A completely new kind of enemy for whom death is not death--and for whom life is not life, either, but illusion, a staging-post, merely *"the thing which is called World."*

Where is the new recruit?

This is a vital question. Joshua?

Yes?

There he is. Good, because I was starting to feel lost in a Quentin Tarantino movie.

Oh crap--that's my phone! Gotta hang up before it rings.

UUUUUT-

UUUUUT-

Whew. Safe. But what the hell was Ezekiel doing calling this phone? I never gave him the number.

I'll have to think about that later--right now--

BREEEEE!

DAMN! I FORGOT ABOUT THE MESSAGE BEEP!

Who's there?

Reveal yourself!

Just your friendly neighborhood Spider-Man.

You'll note all those words have at most three syllables.

YOU!

That beep was for *you*. I have a message from your family. They miss you.

BAP!

SMACK!

AUGH!

AGH!

Hey, I found a way to get normal sounds out of you guys!

We will not be easily overcome by an ignorant vigilante such as yourself.

You came looking for me... again?

NYC

I...I do not understand.

And apparently you don't use contractions anymore.

THUD!

I think that will be enough nonsense and bickering for one night, gentlemen. Let's get to work.

Ezekiel?!

I tried to ring you, but your voice mail picked up. I see you were otherwise engaged.

You're part of this racket--?

No, I'm "this racket's" founder.

Calm down, everyone. Let's all behave like the nice, intelligent vigilantes that we are now.

But he's--

It's all right. We're on good terms.

Where is Joshua, our new recruit?

I'm right here, sir.

You can get these guys to call you "sir"? Nobody even calls *me* sir.

Okay, I want ***answers***--

That's where ***what*** starts?

We all want answers. It's the right questions no one's asking. That's where it starts.

Everything begins with questions. I think even the Big Bang might have been a simple question. Perhaps: What am I? But let's leave the philosophy behind for a more personal answer to all of this.

When did you first meet Joshua?

At a busy intersection, during a car-jacking. I left him for the police to arrest.

"And what ***happens*** to people who are arrested?"

"They go to jail."

"And what do they ***do*** in jail?"

"This is stupid."

"What do they ***do*** in jail?"

"Serve out their sentence."

"How?"

"C'mon, this is stupid."

"Let me put it another way... How many hours in a day are there? Twenty-four, yes? How do you spend twenty-four hours in jail?"

"Eating, sleeping, brawling, watching TV, I guess. Some probably get visitation."

"They also get ***books***, if they think about ordering them. There are many people who spend their whole lives in prison reading books. What do you suppose inmates read about?"

ONE WAY

"I'm thinking the self-help bestsellers are probably not really big with the inmates."

"There are a few people who start to read books by J. Krishnamurti, Benedict de Spinoza, Aristotle, the Buddhist Sutras, Plato, Marcus Aurelius. *Why?*

"They *find* these books because they are *looking* for something...they are looking for pieces of themselves in authority... pieces they have failed to find in the authority of the world today."

PAROLE BOARD

"Yeah well, we all do that. And most of us don't mug, rob or perform grand-theft auto."

GRANTED

"No, we don't ask questions. We do not think critically as a society. We are told not to think by TV, radio, pre-packaged processed foods, drive-throughs, aerobics classes, late night infomercials, or the news.

"We are entertained, yes, but we are not taught to ask the right questions. There are only a few books open to a few minds in this country. Even less in this world.

"Do you pay attention to all the men and women you have thrown in jail, Spider-Man?"

"I--that would be *thousands* by now--"

"And perhaps *one* out of ten thousand picked up a book one day, a book about revolution starting within, or about critical thinking, about finding one's own voice...Would you ever know about that moment?"

One fragile moment where they are alone with nothing to distract them from their own mind, a mind that they've been too afraid their whole lives to listen to, a mind that finally opens up and starts to learn. One day, in one jail cell, in one part of this city.

Would you ever know about it?

No.

That's what I *thought*. And *that* is why you still have a long way to go at being a true guardian in the mythic sense, even after all these years hard at work. To protect the public is to not abandon anyone, you know.

Sounds great. Does it bother you that it's impossible?

Ezekiel *is* the impossible! We work with him because he doesn't ask us to worship everything he has to say. He encourages us to think for ourselves and make things change.

Unlike you. *You* stop things as they go wrong, but you don't do anything to keep them from going wrong in the first place.

I see you're still sore about my choice of the word "loser" on your web-cage.

You can snoop around all you like here. You'll find we are doing nothing illegal, treasonous, or counter-productive to society.

I'm happy to disappoint you that way. But I *do* ask that you keep this strictly confidential.

All right. I won't say anything about this--for ***now***. But if I find you doing anything even slightly blue, I will turn this whole organization in.

Besides, I didn't come here to bust you guys. I came--

--to find ***you***.

I'm no longer involved in criminal activities, so point that sticky finger into someone else's clavicle.

It's about Melissa.

Melissa? My ***sister?*** How did you--

She's getting into serious trouble trying to find you. You owe it to her to come home.

I swore I wouldn't go back until I made something of myself.

Maybe you already have.

If you don't set an example for your sister, she's gonna fall, despite all your good intentions and a passing acquaintance with the Oxford English Dictionary.

Not that I keep an eye on anyone I've turned in, or look after their families while they're incarcerated or anything, because like you said, Ezekiel, I'm not that kinda guy... ***right?***

Maybe.

And maybe my associates here aren't the ***only*** ones who are learning a few things about thinking long-term...

...so then what happened? Did he ever visit her?

Yeah... he did.

Tell you the truth, I was pretty proud of how it all went down. I couldn't have timed it better if I'd written a script for the Hallmark Channel. But to be on the safe side, I left her window webbed. Just for a while.

It's like those old science experiments where you seal off all the exits so the rat has only one way to go to get the cheese and--

What is it? Am I talking too much about the "Other Me," or maybe I didn't ask you how your day went, and I know how I can get caught up on one topic and talk for a long time without stopping in these really long run-on sentences and--

You're doing just fine, Tiger.

Oh, Thanks.

You still didn't tell me how it was when you first saw them together.

Oh, right.

It's like I said, the constant variable is not the part of it that you're getting incorrect, it's the--

No way!

It's--

--Joshua?

Hi Mel. It's been a while.

JOOOOOOSH!

YOU JERK!

OOF!

GOD, MEL!

Don't ever take off like that again!

I'll be feeling how close that was to my solar plexus for at least a week.

It's so good to see you, and--

Where the heck did you learn to talk like one of our biology textbooks?

Hey, c'mere! This is my brother, Joshua. Joshua, this is my senior bio teacher, Mr. Parker.

Nice to meet you, Mr. Parker.

It's... nice to meet you, too.

...*again* anyway, and on good behavior now.

I looked all over for you, Josh. Sheesh, I mean the only person I didn't get a chance to ask was that stupid creep, Spider-Man.

Mel, I got a visit from Spider-Man the other night saying you were getting in over your head here.

What a *loser!* I am *not!* I was worried about you--*seriously* worried--and you never came by after getting out of jail so I took it upon myself to--

I'm sorry. Did you say that you actually got a visit from Spider-Man?

I just had to do it.

Yeah, he looked me up at my new job and then gave me a lecture about falling out of touch with my family. Why?

Huh. Sounds like somebody here has a Mythic Guardian. Spiders must like you, Melissa.

What? *Why?* I mean--do you think that Spider-Man was...No way. But there was that whole *thing* with the gang and the weird thing with the garbage bins falling and...

You're just *messin'* with me!

Could be.

You're such a geek.

I think you mean nerd.

Whatever.

Josh, you're staying for dinner. Mom gets home in half an hour. I'm chaining you to the couch until then.

Later, Mr. Parker!

One down.

About one thousand, seven hundred and forty-three left to look in on.

It's going to be a great day.

NEW BEGINNINGS

Peter Parker, the Amazing Spider-Man, and the estranged love of his life, Mary Jane Watson, continue to come to terms with their recent reconciliation. As Peter deals with matters of the heart, his web-swinging alter ego faces a new, superhuman threat: Digger, the gamma-powered composite of the infamous Vegas Thirteen, killed forty years ago by mob boss Morris Forelli. With danger lurking behind every corner, Spider-Man must call upon all his astonishing abilities to protect Forelli and the mobster's unsuspecting daughter ... not to mention stay alive.

Plus: Peter faces the unintended consequences of his heroic actions as one of his students seaches desperately for her missing brother — who Spider-Man hand-delivered to the police.

Collecting Amazing Spider-Man #51-56 — written by J. Michael Straczynski (TV's Babylon 5, Supreme Power) with Fiona Avery (Rogue) and illustrated by John Romita Jr. (Thor, Incredible Hulk).

MARVEL

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